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ABSTRACT

The forms of parent involvement explored by researchers are varied, ranging from parents' encouragement of their children in the home to intense parent-school partnerships in which parents are involved in every aspect of the educational process. This paper summarizes selected studies of parent involvement which fall within the following three major categories: (1) parent-child relationships in the home; (2) parent training or involvement in performance contracts; and (3) parent-school-community partnerships. The research on parent behaviors and attitudes at home which promote children's learning indicates that parental encouragement of positive attitudes towards education and high expectations for student success have a profoundly positive effect on student achievement. The literature on parent training or involvement in performance contracts focuses on attempts by educators to provide parents with skills they can employ to foster their children's learning process. The studies on parent-school partnership models stress the involvement of parents in decision making and every other aspect of the educational process. The research cited in this review provides evidence that parent involvement is positively related to gains in achievement for students at all levels of income. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A Review of the Literature

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation

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FOREWORD

This paper was prepared to provide background information to participants in the March, 1993 Illinois Summit on Parent Involvement sponsored by the Office of the Governor and the Illinois State Board of Education. The paper was prepared by Joyce Flood in the Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation, and the interpretations and conclusions herein do not necessarily reflect the position or the policy of the Illinois State Board of Education.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A Review of the Literature

The concept of parents and schools sharing the responsibility for educating our children has been in existence for many years but has received increased attention during the past decade as the plight of our nation's educational system has come to light. Most discussion of means to restructure our schools and improve student academic achievement includes some form of parent involvement. The literature examining the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement is voluminous and presents a clear pattern of positive relationship. Several prominent researchers have conducted extensive reviews of the literature and have reached similar conclusions. The following comments demonstrate the common threads of thought among these researchers:

"—the evidence is beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools." (Henderson, 1987)

"The research suggests that students at all levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved." (Epstein, 1992)

"These positive effects of parent involvement on student achievement are sustained across grade levels (preschool through high school), in programs that are home-based or school-based, and for low-income as well as middle-income families." (Swap, 1990)

The forms of parent involvement explored by researchers are varied and range from parent encouragement in the home to intense parent/school partnerships involving the parents in every aspect of the educational process. Based on her comprehensive review of the research, Anne Henderson (1981, 1987) surmises that "—there is no one best way to go about it.—what works is for parents to be involved in a variety of roles over a period of time. The form of parent involvement does not seem to be as important as that it is reasonably well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting.—public relations campaigns, one-way communications devices, or dog-and-pony shows are not effective."

In general, the various forms of parent involvement studied appear to fall within three major categories: parent-child relationships in the home, parent training or

involvement in performance contracts and parent/school/community partnerships. The first category of research focuses on parent behaviors and attitudes at home which promote children's learning. The findings of studies in this group indicate that parental encouragement of positive attitudes towards education and high expectations for student success have a profoundly positive effect on student achievement. The second category focuses on deliberate attempts by educators, through either special training or performance contracts, to provide parents with skills they can employ to foster their children's learning process. Finally, the third category focuses on parent/school partnership models wherein schools view parents as valuable resources and, therefore, include them in every aspect of the educational process. Within these models, parents and educators view each other with respect and share the power of decision making.

Findings from studies selected within each of these categories are summarized below:

Parent-Child Relationships in the Home

Siders, 1978--When parents were involved in a structured home reading program, their seven- and eight-year-olds showed more positive attitudes about reading and had higher reading test scores than did their peers whose parents did not read with them at home.

Iverson, 1982--Analyses of eighteen studies on the correlation between home environment and learning suggested that ability and achievement are more closely linked to the socio-psychological environment and intellectual stimulation in the home than they are to parental socioeconomic status indicators.

Clark, 1983-- Poor black senior high school students classified as high achievers came from families characterized by frequent and warm interactions between parents and children and strong parent encouragement of academic pursuits.

Bloom, 1986--Factors in the home environment such as academic guidance and support and expectations for student success were found to be highly correlated with student achievement.

Dornbusch, 1986--"Authoritative" parenting was associated with good grades for both sexes across the high school years for all ethnic groups, family structure and levels of parental education studied. "Authoritative" was defined as encouraging children to look at both sides of an issue, encouraging participation in decision making and responding to good grades with encouragement and offers of help.

Parent Training or Involvement in Performance Contracts

Gillum, 1977--A study of three Michigan school districts involving parents in performance contracts to improve children's reading skills revealed that the district with the most comprehensive parent program scored the greatest gains in reading achievement.

Walberg, 1980--Reading comprehension test scores were significantly improved for students in grades 1-6 whose parents and teachers participated in a city-wide program to help parents create academic support conditions in the home. Under contract, parents agreed to (1) provide a special place in the home for study, (2) encourage their children daily through discussion, (3) attend to the student's progress in school and (4) cooperate with the teacher in providing all of these things properly.

Cochran, 1986--Compared to a matched control group, students enrolled in an early intervention program demonstrated greater achievement levels upon entering public school. A major feature of the program was the training of parents in parent-child learning activities.

Epstein, in press--Analysis of test scores on the California Achievement Test showed that students whose teachers frequently involved parents in learning activities at home performed better in reading than did students whose teachers involved parents infrequently or not at all.

Parent/School/Community Partnerships

Armor, 1976--A review of twenty elementary schools whose predominantly low-income, minority students showed consistent gains in sixth grade reading test scores disclosed that the greater the extent of parent/community involvement in the school decision-making process the better the performance of its sixth graders.

Comer, 1986--Developed by the Yale Child Study Center Team in the New Haven public schools, a parent participation program successfully improved the academic ranking of the school from 32nd out of 33 schools in 1969 to 3rd out of 26 schools in 1984. The program exemplifies efforts to bring together mental health professionals, educators, parents and other community members to improve the academic, social and emotional well-being of their children.

Moses, 1989--The Algebra Project, which focused on finding a way for all children to have access to college preparatory mathematics curriculum, resulted in significant improvement in students' mathematics achievement. Through a collaborative governance model, the project involved parents in activities that would enable them to support their children's learning.

Though research to date has effectively demonstrated that parent involvement is positively related to gains in achievement for students at all levels of income, there is little evidence that parent involvement has been able to close the gap between low- and middle-income students. There are, however, a few exceptions such as the Yale Child Study Center New Haven project. Students in this program for five years approached national norms in reading and attained the national norm in math (Comer, 1980).

Also, the research has tended to lack focus on specific practices and what works best under individual school and district circumstances. Epstein (1992) states "Research is needed that provides information on the effects of specific practices so that schools can more purposely choose practices to help them obtain specific benefits from their investments in school and family connections."

Nevertheless, the concept of parent involvement in the education of their children, particularly the partnership model (Swap, 1990), does hold great promise. It does, after all, make intuitive sense. For who has more awareness of their children's individual learning styles and emotional/social needs than parents? When parents are asked for advice about the educational destinies of their children, it naturally follows that they have a greater sense of control and, therefore, ownership and responsibility for the ultimate direction and outcome of educational practices in our schools.

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